

# Catoctin Mountain Park

National Park Service  
U. S. Department of Interior

## Deerfield Nature Trail

**A**t Owens Creek Campground, the trail begins just beyond campsite #30. Those who are not camping should park at the amphitheater near campsite #1. This mile-and-a-half trail with numbered posts returns in a loop to the campground. Loose stones along the trail can be slippery; please watch your step.

White-tailed deer roamed this land in Indian times but settlers brought change to Catoctin Mountain. They cleared the land, built houses, and began to farm. Later the mountain was clear-cut for lumber and for charcoal to feed the iron furnaces in the area. When the federal government bought the land in the early 1930's, no deer remained in the region. In the '40s the National Park Service captured a few white-tails and released them on the mountain. Now, without predators to keep them in check, the white-tail population has grown far beyond what the forest can support. Damage to the environment by hungry deer is under study in the park. The staff is seeking ways to manage the deer population so as to promote the health of plants and animals alike.

On this trail, signs of deer are plentiful. If you move quietly, you might see the white flash of rump as a deer bounds away when its sensitive ears and nose warn of your approach. We hope you enjoy your trek through the world of the white-tail.



## Trail Guide

**1.** In summer the coat of the white-tailed deer is reddish brown and smooth. By October a thick coat of hollow, grey-brown hairs prepares the deer for winter temperatures. A full-grown deer may stand three feet tall at the shoulder and weigh as much as 175 pounds. The white-tail has distinctive white patches on its belly, throat, near the eyes, and beneath the tail. When a deer is alarmed, its tail goes up like a flag. Fawns bleat like lambs while older deer snort through their noses.

**2.** Owens Creek offers water and a variety of food and shelter for deer. Deer can find browse within reach in the cut-over forest and brush of abandoned farmland. Branches of older trees are too high for deer to reach. This beech



Beech Tree

tree has tender leaves in spring and summer and nuts in the fall. Small maple saplings are food too but the shy deer may not

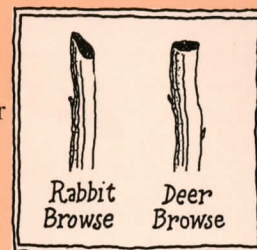
venture this close to the campground.

**3.** Stumps like this are the remains of American Chestnut trees, killed by the blight that struck in 1904. The deer and turkey populations plummeted when the chestnuts, a major source of food, were gone.

**4.** Deer browse becomes more evident away from the campground. On the hillside the lower branches of young trees are stripped of leaves and buds. The amount of damage throughout the

park indicates the impact of the deer population on the environment. Other animals browse too. Rabbits, for instance, slice stalks at a neat angle with their sharp front teeth, while a deer's molars chew the twigs roughly.

**5.** Among abundant plants in the park are spicebush, named for its lemony aromatic scent, and squawroot, a plant that has no chlorophyll and must therefore steal nourishment from the roots of oak trees. The deer do not rely much on them.



Rabbit  
Browse

Deer  
Browse



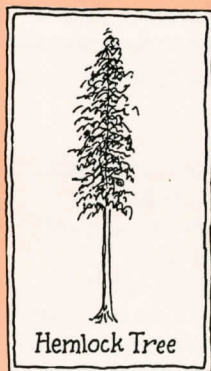
Squawroot



**6.** The female deer is called a “doe”; the male is a “buck.” Each spring the male grows antlers which it uses to protect its territory from other bucks competing for does. The more mature and healthy the buck is, the more times it grows on its antlers. The bony antlers are nourished by blood vessels in a furry covering called “velvet.” By September antlers are full grown and the velvet begins to peel off. The buck will polish his antlers on small resilient trees like these, leaving scrape marks known as “buck rubs.”

**7.** Stone walls marking the boundaries of homesteads and farms still stand in the park. They are part of the park’s cultural history. Please leave undisturbed all the park’s resources.

**8.** The vegetation is thicker around old farmsteads. Far enough from the campground for safety, this area might be a birthing ground. In May or June the doe could leave her newborn fawn (sometimes twins) here. The baby’s dappled coat helps hide it in the sun-spotted brush.



Hemlock Tree

**9.** In winter, a group of deer may shelter under the low-hanging limbs of evergreens. Branches catch the snow and act to trap the heat given off by the deer. This hemlock tree came down in a winter storm so the deer will have to find a new shelter.

*The trail turns left and crosses the stream.*



Deer Print

**11.** Hungry deer actually eat the inner bark of some trees, favoring elm bark because it peels off easily in long strips. This is called “bark stripping.” If the bark is peeled away all around the trunk, the tree will die.

**12.** These evergreen Christmas ferns may provide food for deer in winter, a time of hunger. In harsh times and overpopulated conditions, some deer become too weak to survive. Those that cannot last out the winter become food for scavengers like raccoons, opossums, foxes, and some birds.



Christmas Fern

**13.** The white-tailed deer compete with wild turkeys and squirrels for the acorns dropped by oaks in the park.

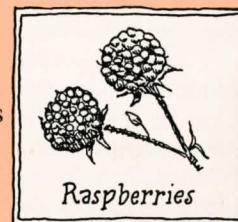


White Oak Tree

Based on measurements of the circumference and height of the tree, we estimate this white oak is more than 150 years old.

**14.** Iron furnaces of the region used charcoal, burning hot and smokeless, to process iron ore in the late 1700s and the following century. Flat hearths such as the one on the left were cleared to harvest wood and produce charcoal. The resulting loss of food and shelter drove the deer away.

**15.** Growing near the end of the trail and ripening in the summer, raspberries and wineberries are another source of food for deer.



Raspberries

*Follow the trail to the left and cross the bridge. Please respect the privacy of others and do not cut through anyone’s campsite.*

In every season, the sights and sounds of the park change. To discover more about Catoctin Mountain, try Brown’s Farm Trail (Owens Creek picnic area) and the Hog Rock Nature Trail (across the parking lot on Park Central Road), or stop by the visitor center.

The National Park Service maintains other interpretive trails at Catoctin Mountain Park. For information write: Superintendent, Catoctin Mountain Park, 6602 Foxville Rd., Thurmont, MD 21788; or call (301) 663-9388 (V/TDD). In case of emergency, call (301) 663-9343.

